Howard/Jerry/Hacsi for archives:

Here is something sent to me by Richard Austin, early Point director. He's hoping there will be room in MWEC for Point history, including this stuff. I'm dubious about our having space to tell a lot of the Catalog history, much less Point history, but I'll put the letter in the Backmatter bucket.

You may want to file it in the archives as well.

Mike
6/14/94

FIRST LIGHT

A COMMUNICATIONS COMPANY

May 27, 1994

The Millennium Whole Earth Catalog
Mike Stone, Managing Editor
P.O. Box 38
Sausalito, CA 94966

Dear Mike,

It was good talking with you today. I've been away from "Whole Earth" for a long time and it felt good to touch base. I'll come for lunch one of these Thursdays as you suggested.

The article I mentioned is enclosed. It was written by Paul Ciotti after interviewing the directors and myself. The photo of the torch I added when I made copies of the article for inquiries coming into the foundation. I had produced the first two POINT reports, prompting Paul's visit, a third followed the next year. I'd be surprised if there were any left in the archives there at WER headquarters.

The article covers the basics of our process during the initial years of the foundation. There is a lot more information I can pass along if, after reading this piece, you want to do a phone interview or something. At the very least it tells how we shaped the foundation of the Foundation.

Dr. Nathan Hare and Baker Roshi also came onto the board during that period. The first woman board member was Jan Mirikatani. As I mentioned on the phone, we had a three year kick-out rule. After three years we each had to leave, at least for a year, and make room for fresh thoughts and energies.

My office, where all POINT business was administered, was located on the roof of the Glide Memorial Church office building, two tiny rooms plus the remainder of the roof serving as a huge sundeck.

Hope you can fit it into the new Catalog. Good history stuff and still solid in terms of operating principals for any grant giving organization. I'd be interested in how close current activities/values are to those at the founding of POINT?

Earthly Warm Regards,

Richard R. Austin, CEO/Founder

P.O. Box 24458 Los Angeles, CA 90024 310-842-6332

"San Francisco"
January 1975

ARTICLE WRITTEN BY:
PAUL Giotti

MIKE,
This was during my "anonymous period". You know the old saying—
"Keep Silent, Keep Moving and Cover Your Tracks."
Richard Austin

THERE'S GREAT JOY IN SERVICE TO MANKIND.

"Competent administrators are nearly as rare as saints, especially in the field of non-profit work . . ."

Who Are These Guys and What Do They Want?— The Point Reports as Literature

Point, by the Point Foundation Press, in two volumes, $30.

If the talented young author of this brilliant first novel had only given his name, I would confidently predict that we would be seeing it on the covers of best-selling books for many years to come. For the complete mastery this young author shows of a wide variety of literary techniques would incite the envy of many a more seasoned professional. Unfortunately, for reasons best known to himself, the author prefers to continue his touching deception that the novel is really only the annual report of a tax exempt foundation of the same name that flourished in San Francisco in the early seventies.

Point is a book presented to the reader in the form of letters, financial statements, meeting minutes and even press clippings, everything in fact which purportedly came across the desk of the foundation's recording secretary during those years (1972 and 1973). Making the illusion complete is the physical appearance of the two volumes themselves, which come with plain white soft covers and pages of ordinary duplicating paper. Carrying the matter to somewhat hysterical lengths, the spine is held together with do-it-yourself aluminum screws and the text often runs under the binding so that you occasionally have to pry open the book to read a complete sentence. This does not, however, detract from the content of the book itself, which is really a treasury of wit, wisdom, philosophy, insight and just plain practical knowledge (much of it scientific, financial and legal).

Somewhat surprisingly for such a marvelously complex book, the basic plot is simple and direct. There are five or six foundation directors, each of whom has some $55,000 to give away each year at his sole discretion. The book then concerns the moral dilemma which confronts these men as they decide how best to use the money, what grants they finally make, and finally the conclusions they come to regarding the uses, misuses and morality of being in a position to give away large sums.

While characterization in the book is often incomplete (its virtues lie elsewhere), one of the main protagonists is a fellow named Stewart Brand, who has made a lot of money selling *Whole Earth Catalogs*. Since he has no need for all this money that keeps pouring in over the transom, he turns for advice to his patron from the lean early days of the *Catalog*, Dick Raymond, a Harvard-trained economist now at the Portola Institute in Menlo Park. Their happy solution is to start a foundation to return the money to the economy, and at the same time to do some good. For this they will need several other directors. Their criteria: Candidates must be professionals of one sort or another, with time to spend on Point but also with important work of their own. (When you want something done, ask a busy man, says Brand.) Candidates should also be low on ideology, high on delivery and capable of working well together — altogether the sort of person the directors designate as "Alphafish." The idea here is that there are all sorts of fishes in the stream, all of them important and all with their own special contributions to make. But when you need someone to depend on, you call on an Alphafish.

Besides themselves, Brand and Raymond appoint Mike Phillips, former vice president of the Bank of California who threw it all over to become what he calls a "conceptual artist" and treasurer of San Francisco's Glide Church; Jerry Mander, former ad man now working as a media consultant, among whose special concerns are women's rights and whales; and Huey Johnson, hard-nosed environmentalist of the old school, whose primary concern is the acquisition and preservation of public lands in trust for future generations.

To help ensure that they don't fall into the same old traps that other foundations seem prey to, they decide to keep their board meetings as informal as possible. They meet on salmon boats at sea, in Indian tepees, in coffee houses in North Beach, on remote ranches in the Santa Cruz mountains, in the hot water baths at Esalen and also, occasionally, indoors like everyone else.

For diversity they create a revolving outside directorship called Elijah, to which they appoint a different person every meeting. The original concept is the Elijah will have discretionary funding powers like everyone else. But the first Elijah gives his wife $15,000, whereupon they rethink the original premise. (If you consider what was learned, Dick Raymond will later say, it was still the best grant Point ever made.)

As befits practical men of the caliber of Point directors, they decide that each of them should commit to paper what he thinks the goals and aspirations of the foundation should be. These they call their "destination papers." One of the best is written by Dick Raymond, who, as director of Portola Institute, is not without some experience in such matters. His argument runs thusly:

The custom of doing good institutionally is very likely the invention of the Devil. Probably everyone eventually fails at it. And in any case no one has yet shown why

people should spend their time engaged in such activities. Instead, the directors ought to seek to encourage experimentation having to do with those values which the directors especially cherish. Examples might be: caring and sharing, being humanistic, being autonomous, having a sense of the universe's wholeness, searching for understanding, creating hilarity and being aware of karmic differences (psychic pluralism).

To conduct all this experimentation will require certain kinds of people. The best experimenters are perhaps those who are now doing it voluntarily. Even compulsively. These intellectual-psychic colonists are already at society's horizons in the search for such things as alternate economic systems, new ways of learning how the world is put together, better ways to operate societally, alternatives to cities, living more fully on less, developing psychic talents, saving the planet's resources, and building better shelters.

What they need right now are strategies (traditions, if you will) for using their talents and resources. While it is difficult to say exactly what Point should do to help, the major fallacies that foundation directors seem especially susceptible to have at least been systematically classified. Basically they are these:

1. *Create a successful role model and everyone else will adopt it.* No, they won't, at least not voluntarily. There may be, in fact, a greater propensity in the human animal to reject successful models than to adopt them.

2. *A well-designed project will cause people to change their beliefs and habits, making them into both participants and supporters.* No again. Crusaders don't make the converts we might think they do. The process of changing someone's mind is much more intricate than any of us knows.

3. *Experiment with a program until you get all the bugs out. After that it can operate on its own.* The fallacy here is in thinking that the experiment is finished. Actually it never stops. Permanence is a synonym for rigidity and decadence.

4. *There are many original ideas and unique activities that merit support.* Not so. Surprisingly few people carry that kind of a fantasy around with them. Still fewer have fantasies that can generate support.

5. *Anyone who can persuasively articulate a good idea will be a competent administrator of that idea.* Competent administrators are nearly as rare as saints, especially in the field of nonprofit work. (Incompetence is more severely felt in the important function of financial control.)

6. *The best way to stretch foundation dollars is to insist on matching funds.* Bullshit. The matching funds never appear, and the project goes limping into the world with half a chassis and no engine.

7. *Nice equipment and buildings are important because they tend to symbolize and identify the project.* Nice try. What really happens, though, is that you attract identity-seekers rather than contributing participants. Also the property soon possesses you and not vice-versa.

8. *If you encourage staff participation in decision-making, the staff will then understand the operation as a whole and thus act well and wisely in fulfilling its role.* A classic half-truth. Probably the idea of participative decision-making is an attractive slogan in search of a solid theory to support it.

9. *Saying something well is equivalent to doing something well.* This immortal fallacy is so loaded with deception that it is almost elegantly evil. The shocking part is that it goes unchallenged from one generation to the next.

Other traps to avoid are giving money to people who don't yet have a plan for carrying out their idea — this only incapacitates them. And giving money to people in the middle of a divorce.

On the positive side of the ledger, advice is mainly this: Form an alliance with the person you grant the money to — don't merely hand him the cash. In order for the disposing of surplus money to be clean and joyful, the concept of exchanging has to be substituted for that of giving. Both parties must be required to declare their values and expectations, and not merely the giver.

Forewarned, as they say, is forearmed. And having dutifully set forth their goals, the Point directors step smartly to the forefront and begin distributing the grants.